

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 13, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Janet Yellen
Secretary
Department of Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Yellen:

As the Co-Chairs of the Congressional U.S.-Lebanon Friendship Caucus, our concern for the country of our ancestors, friends and families is obvious. But it is no less rooted in America's enduring national interest in a key region of the world and what we believe to be Lebanon's unique potential as a free, sovereign, and stable country, fulfilling its democratic commitment to its people.

Lebanon is in a state of crisis— a crumbling economy, a stalled, caretaker government, and an ongoing humanitarian crisis. However, now is an opportunity to encourage decisive action to support the potential of a bright future for Lebanon.

Of specific concern: Lebanon's presidency has remained vacant since 31 October 2022 and Lebanon's Parliament has failed in its signature, constitutional duty to form a government through the election of a new president and chart a new national course by establishing a government free of corruption. On a near-daily basis, parliamentary procedural antics continue to thwart the election of a consensus candidate and the formation of national leadership. This has only perpetuated Lebanon's civic problems, furthered the ongoing humanitarian emergency, and encouraged non-state actors to further grow their influence in a political vacuum.

Political instability has also prevented any meaningful investigation into the August 2020 Port explosion, which displaced 300,000 citizens, injured more than 6,000, and led to more than 200 deaths. Basic goods and services – including electricity, medicine, and healthcare – are increasingly difficult to obtain. The financial downturn has resulted in a 95 percent depreciation of the Lebanese pound, with banks preventing the withdrawal of funds from depositors. The central bank chief has yet to provide answers.

The situation on the ground in Lebanon remains dire. The World Health Organization estimates 40 percent of doctors have left the country and Lebanon is facing a cholera outbreak for the first time in decades. Lebanon has the most refugees per capita in the world. The World Food Program notes that nearly half of the population of Lebanon is facing constant food shortages, with the basic food basket price increasing 340 percent between 2019 and June 2021.

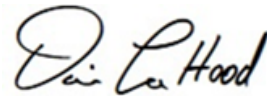
We believe the Administration can help end the stalemate by utilizing additional diplomatic tools to hold responsible those who are continuing to obstruct democratic processes in Lebanon. The United States must make clear the expectations of the international community on Lebanon, including timely and representative Presidential elections by the Parliament to support the ongoing needs of the people of Lebanon. Additionally, continued international engagement and assistance should reflect the ability of the Lebanese government to enact badly needed economic reforms and support for an independent country outside malign third-party influence, and judicial independence.

The results of the May 2022 Parliamentary elections prove that the people of Lebanon want to live under democratic rule that supports their birthright of national determination. America should continue to support the Lebanese people in their efforts for a sovereign, stable, and representative Lebanon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Darrell Issa', with a stylized, flowing script.

DARRELL ISSA
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darin LaHood', with a clear, legible script.

DARIN LAHOOD
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Debbie Dingell', with a stylized, flowing script.

DEBBIE DINGELL
Member of Congress